

## Stigma-Free Essay Contest

*Sponsored by the Boonton United Methodist Church & Montville United Methodist Church*

**Submission Deadline:** December 15, 2018

**Who can Participate?:** Any jr. high (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) or high school (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) student attending school in New Jersey.

**Award:** Two awards of \$250 each (one for a 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade student, one for a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade student). A \$150 Amazon gift card will go to each selected student as a prize and \$100 will go towards a project each selected student will initiate that will help to further eliminate the stigma of issues such as mental health disorders, substance use disorders, or other.

**Primary Essay Topic:** Write a **1-2 page** (double spaced, 12-pt. Times New Roman font with 1" margins) **essay** on how a stigmatized issue (e.g. any mental health disorder or substance use disorder) has impacted you or those you know personally, and what suggestions you might offer to your community to help lessen the negative impact of the stigma surrounding the issue being addressed in your essay.

**Two Additional Short Writings:** In addition to and separate from your essay, using **no more than 100 words**, describe why is it important to be stigma-free. Also, using **no more than 200 words**, describe a project you would like to initiate to help eliminate the stigma attached to any of these issues if you were awarded the prize.

When we look at the statistics of particular issues that have often been stigmatized in our day and age, we are surprised and often horrified:

- In the past five years, nearly 11,000 individuals died in NJ alone from drug overdoses. Nationally, in 2017, we saw 72,000 lives lost to overdoses, the leading cause of death, with a 10% increase from the year before.
- We are told that 123 people in America die from suicide each day. This death toll has been increasing every year since 2000, and for each life lost to suicide, there are 25 suicide attempts,
- One in five people experience a diagnosable mental health disorder, but the average individual with symptoms doesn't seek help for 8-10 years.

To stigmatize someone means to place a mark of disgrace or reproach upon them. When stigmas are placed on individuals or groups, they often lead to prejudices, discrimination, and misunderstandings. Many individuals who experience substance use disorders or mental health disorders do not seek help because of fear, shame, or judgment from friends or family.

The Boonton United Methodist Church and Montville United Methodist Church are making steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with those who deal with mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and more. Eliminating such stigmas will better enable and empower individuals to get the resources they need without judgment and allow everyone to be more aware, educated, and alert to these often hidden and misunderstood issues.

We challenge any jr. high or high school student to pick one topic under the category of stigmatized issues (e.g. any mental health disorder or substance use disorder), a few examples of which are bullet-pointed above, and write a 1-2 page essay, along with the two additional short writings, as detailed and outlined above.

**All submissions can be emailed to Pastor Donald Kirschner at [pastordonaldk44@gmail.com](mailto:pastordonaldk44@gmail.com). In your email, please include your name, grade level, and what school you attend when submitting your essay and short writings.** Feel free to also email with any questions you might have regarding the essay contest. The winners of the Stigma-Free Essay Contest will be notified and announced in January of 2019.

Sincerely,

Pastor Donald Kirschner

*On behalf of The Boonton United Methodist Church and Montville United Methodist Church*